DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 138 934 CS 003 393

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TITLE Reading Is Languaging in Print.
PUB DATE Aug 76
NOTE 15p.; Speech given at the Annual Meeting of the International World Congress on Reading (6th, Singapore, August 17-19, 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Basic Reading; *Beginning Reading; *Child Language; *Language Patterns; *Language Research; Primary Education; Reading Instruction; *Reading Materials; Reading Processes; Reading Programs; *Reading Research; Reading Skills
IDENTIFIERS Australia; Mount Gravatt Developmental Language Reading Prog

ABSTRACT

Children's mastery of reading skills would be facilitated if reading programs capitalized on children's already-developed oral language competence. Barriers against "reading for meaning" exist when the cues used for predicting in oral language are not present in the written language which confronts children; yet anaylses of four reading series commonly used in Australia show that there is a great difference between the language they use and the language used by 5 1/2-year-old children. The Mount Gravatt Developmental Language Reading Program has been developed to help children move from developing oral language behavior to developing competence in written language. Language samples collected from children 2 1/2 years to 6 1/2 years and analyzed through a computer concordance program have yielded information about "signalling sequences" (which signal syntactically and semantically what will follow) and other elements characteristic of children's speech. The program is built around the core "signalling sequences" appropriate for each grade level, combined with meaningful "content sequences." Children first use the sequences in oral langauge and then transfer meaning to the written form through the use of word cards and reading books. Word attack skills are taught once children have learned to decode for themselves. (GW)

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ED138934

READING IS LANGUAGING IN PRINT

PAPER PRESENTED AT THE SIXTH WORLD CONGRESS
OF THE INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION,
SINGAPORE, AUGUST, 1976.

Dr. N.W.M. HART

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CS003 393

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TITLE: READING IS LANGUAGING IN PRINT

"An Innovative Language Program for Young Children Based on Theoretical Assumptions Made by Examining the Language Development of Large Groups of Children Between 2½ and 6½ Years"

MEETING: INNOVATIVE BEGINNING READING PROGRAMS

DATE: Tues., August 17, 1976

Speaking, listening, reading and writing are all different manifestations of what I have referred to in the title of this paper as "Languaging". Speaking, listening, reading and writing are different facets of language functioning. The basic assumption behind the Mt. Gravatt Developmental Language-Reading Program is that a reading program should be subsumed under a language program which is aimed at the progressive mastery by each child, of his functional language potential.

Young children come to school from a very successful language program - very few indeed have failed to develop a remarkably sophisticated and efficient functional oral language system. They are effective language users in the oral form - they have been and are still highly successful language learners. They have learnt through speaking and listening.

Research into communicative interaction between young children, their parents and peers at pre-school ages is beginning to reveal something of the teaching and learning strategies which prove so successful in those early years. One thing is clear, and that is that these young children are not taught the rules of oral language - they develop their own rules; they master the oral form of language by progressively improving and modifying rules which "work" for them in the business of communicating in this thing we call language; and they do it, not in special language lessons but in everyday meaningful and purposeful interaction with their world and supported by the sympathetic and functionally-oriented support of their family.

We, as teachers, face the task of assisting children through their second major language task - the mastery of the written form of language. I am afraid we have to admit that our success rate to the present does not compare favourably with that of their teachers of oral language. I want to suggest that one major reason for this comparative lack of success is that we do not capitalise on the product of that earlier success - that secure oral language competence of young children; and that a second major reason is that we abandon the functional perspective and what have proved in oral language acquisition to be very productive language experiences.

In the Mt. Gravatt Program, we have tried to explicate the developing oral language behaviour of children and to build from that oral language basis across to competence in written language. We have also tried to develop the program around learning strategies which have proved so successful in oral language development. The development of the Mt. Gravatt program, therefore, has necessitated both large-scale research into child language and long-term trials of teaching strategies and materials. Research into child language was essential because what linguists have been saying, or at least implying, for a long time about language functioning has been distinctly unhelpful and, in many respects, misleading.

Let me comment on one or two of the unhelpful assumptions about language that have been offered to and accepted by teachers.

The Unreality of the Word for Young Children

Young children, who have used only oral language, have no clear idea of word boundaries. This has been demonstrated by Karpova (6) Huttenlocher (5), Chappell (1), Clay (2), Reid (8), Downing (3), Holden and MacGinitie (4). Frank Smith (9) has pointed out that, indeed, there are no clear boundaries between words in oral language. The earliest segments of oral language, i.e. the constituents of the early one-and two-word utterances examined by such people as Brown, Bellugi, Braine, Bloom and others, happen to correspond with what will turn out to be words in written language, but the more difficult segments, those with which children learn to link these early "content" language units into connected utterance are neither perceived as words nor do they often turn out to be words in the written form of language. An obvious example is "going to" or "gonna". In such utterances as "I'm going to hit you" "going to" is clearly not two words to a child. It is not two anything - it is one very useful chunk of oral language. To illustrate further we could take "used to" in "I used to go to kindergarten". "Used" is certainly not the same segment of language as the "used" in "I used the crayon". In fact, I doubt whether most adults associate the "used" in "used to" with the transitive verb "used" except, perhaps, when they write it. (Some college students still write "use to").

The development of word boundaries is closely associated with the convention of printing. They are not uniformly detectable or even useful for the child in his oral language. The word boundaries of printed language need, therefore, to be learnt by experience with printed language, and, in fact, they do not become functionally essential until the child comes to write. Most recent researchers into child language agree that young children perceive oral language in what Oller calls meaningful "chunks" (Oller et al (7), Huttenlocher, (5)). Linguistically it is still true to say that the smallest meaningful element of language is a morpheme; a word or part of a word - but as I have inferred, a word becomes meaningful only when it is used in context. (What do I mean when I say just "used" or "going"?). Out of context, a word is only slightly more meaningful than the phoneme.

There is, then, no one-to-one correspondence between time gaps which occur in oral speech and the spatial gaps which occur between words in print. There is also no reliable one-to-one correspondence between the meaning of a word in print and that in a sequence of oral

language unless the word is in similar context in both cases. Indeed when the time gap configuration differs from spatial gaps between written words (such as happens with "I'm gonna" and "I am going to"), how could the printed word "am" be meaningful when it is in context? In fact "I am going to" has an emphatic affirmative function rather than the simple future intention of "I'm gonna". We are dealing here with two different chunks of language which carry two different meanings. The important thing to realize is that the language experience which has led to the extensive oral language competence of young children has not included scrutiny of individual words except for what we might loosely call "labelling words", and these children have not had any practice in withdrawing such words from a communicative context. This procedure has not been necessary or useful in their oral language functioning. By the time children come to school, they are using language in connected utterance, in which they semi-automatically associate sequences of sound with meaning arising from the communication context. They do not contemplate the meaning or form of words out of context. They just use connected, meaningful and useful language and they use it very efficiently in their communicative functioning.

When teachers come to teach these children the written form of language, they usually insist upon teaching through a word approach to reading - whether this be through a whole word or phonic approach. Teachers also are very much inclined to remove words from a communicative context. Children understand that language is for communicative use. If young children don't understand what a word is, and if they have been giving meaning to words only through experiencing them in a communicative context, it is hardly surprising when many conclude that this written form of language, so patently important to teachers, has very little to do with the oral language they have mastered and that it does not appear to have a communicative function. When this is the case, we are very likely to produce "recoders" or "word callers" who may or may not become competent in reading and writing; whereas if we aim first at producing "decoders" (who read for meaning), recoding strategies such as word attack skills can then easily be developed. It has been shown, in fact, that children are likely to develop their own word-attack skills by modifying strategies which worked for them in their oral language.

We must produce "decoding" skills before we worry about "recoding" skills, that is, our primary aim must be to foster "reading for meaning" rather than "word calling". Children are used to listening for meaning, they can readily see sense in reading for meaning.

Both listening for meaning and reading for meaning involve predicting forward. Children are used to predicting as they extract meaning from speech; if the language in reading books is fundamentally different from what they have encountered in oral language, predicting for meaning is made very difficult. In other words, barriers against reading for meaning exist when the cues children use for predicting in oral language are not present in the written language which confronts them. Reading must then become a meaningless task which, in some way, known only to adults, may eventually become a functionally useful activity.

Comparisons Between Language Samples

We at Mount Gravatt have compared the language used in a number of contemporary reading books and found that there is a very considerable difference between the language used in those books and that used by 5½

year old children. Yet we find a great similarity between the oral language of children from $3\frac{1}{2}$ to $6\frac{1}{2}$ years of age and a striking coincidence between the oral language of children at ages $5\frac{1}{2}$ and $6\frac{1}{2}$. We have examined these similarities and differences at semantic as well as surface form levels. There is time, however, to show you only the surface form comparisons, but even those are rather telling.

Tables 1 and 2 give examples of the two word and three word sequences that are most frequent in the language of Australian, British and Canadian children.

TABLE 1

The Most Frequently Used Two Word Sequences in the Language of Australian, British and Canadian children

AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN (BRISBANE)											ENGLISH CHILDREN (BRISTOL)		CANADIAN CHILDREN (TORONTO)	
2½ Years		3½ Years		4½ Years		5½ Years		6½ Years			3½ Years		5 Years	
that's	143	I'm	213	I'm	273	I'm	350	I'm	415		I'm	429	and the	367
he's	131	I got	128	that's	114	I'll	210	I'll	277		I want	370	I'm	135
I want	130	that's	111	I'll	87	it's	157	it's	168		that's	179	I like	118
look at	110	's a	78	it's	80	I don't	144	I don't	139		it's	141	you know	102
in there	76	I don't	71	I got	79	I got	126	I've	122		's a	127	and I	99
there's	54	I'll	67	I want	61	I know	101	I got	121		I got	121	I know	56
's a	47	I want	60	you know	38	I can	90	that's	98		I don't	114	and then	54
I got	40	I can	52	I can	37	I've	76	I want	95		I've	108	it's	48
I'm	39	he's	33	's a	36	you're	74	I know	88		I'll	99	going to	43
that one	39	a little	33	I don't	35	got a	72	I have	83		that one	80	I'll	40
it's	31	got a	32	in the	27	that's	65	you're	83		I can't	80	and we	39
want to	30	it's	29	going to	20	I can't	61	I can	73		's that	69	I don't	37
in here	26	do know	25	I think	18	I want	54	you can	57		I will	53	in the	37
he's (has)	25	going to	25	a big	18	I think	41	you know	55		want to	41	and a	32
got a	25	in the	22	got a	16	I didn't	38	I think	49		I have	40	I was	30
look that	23	I think	22	one of	16	's a	36	's a	40		what's	34	I think	29
there you	20	do want	18	know what	16	you know	31	that one	38		is that	32	and they	26
in the	14	I saw	16	I had	16	I was	30	I can't	36		I do	32	to play	22
no I	14	look at	15	I know	16	I have	29	to go	36		I like	31	that's	21
what's	13	do you	14	I saw	15	I did	29	I go	35		going to	29	we have	21

TABLE 2

The Most Frequently Used Three Word Sequences in the Language of Australian, British and Canadian Children

AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN (BRISBANE)										ENGLISH CHILDREN (BRISTOL)		CANADIAN CHILDREN (TORONTO)	
2½ Years		3½ Years		4½ Years		5½ Years		6½ Years		3½ Years		5 Years	
I want to	1986	I'm going	4999	I'm going	3707	I'm going	6126	I'm going	9531	I'm going	8737	I'm going	1031
that's a	1070	I'm not	807	that's a	793	I'm not	2360	I'm not	4171	I want to	6748	you know what	47
he's going	700	that's a	799	that's what	310	I don't know	1903	I've got	1669	I don't want	1264	I like the	43
look at the	480	I don't know	537	I want to	310	it's a	1146	I don't know	1499	I've got	947	and I like	17
he's (has) got	295	I got a	434	I'm making	256	it's not	599	I want to	906	that's a	848	I'm telling	13
he's a	139	I want to	241	you know what	246	I'll get	531	I'll have	900	I want it	658	going to have	11
I got this	107	that's my	175	I'm not	246	I'll have	509	it's a	744	what's that	450	I like to	11
there you are	97	I got to	158	that's the	186	I got a	456	I don't want	660	I want my	376	you know my	9
it's off	84	he's going	156	it's a	116	you're not	454	I'll do	587	I'm not	363	I don't know	9
want to get	56	I'm on	114	I don't know	114	I've got	454	it's not	578	I'm a	339	you know something	9
I'm going	49	it's a	111	I got a	107	I don't want	375	I'll be	496	I'm coming	290	and I'll	9
it's a	25	I can see	96	'm going to	85	I'm doing	366	I'm the	473	I want the	261	and I'm	9
got one of	16	I don't want	89	I'll go	79	I want to	333	I'm doing	448	I'm just	254	to play with	4
in the box	11	that's the	69	I'll take	63	I'll go	309	I'll show	416	I'm going to	235	that's all	3
have a look	9	it's not	49	one of these	52	I'll put	274	I'll go	382	I don't know	203	we have a	3
I like this	5	he's a	43	that's all	46	I'm a	260	I'll get	382	it's a	190	it's not	3
's (has) got a	4	I'll have	41	I've got	37	I'm the	252	I'm getting	381	it's not	169	going to get	3
'm going to	.2	I'll come	31	it's not	32	I got to	207	that's a	378	I'm having	145	I know what	3
've got one	.01	we're going	30	it's going	32	I got one	205	'm going to	370	I got a	137	and then we	2
		'm going to	27	I got gun	32	I'll show	168	I'm up	348	I want a	125	going to play	2

There is some fundamental commonality across the language of children of these ages which has not been caught by the controls applied to the language used in children's readers.

Table 3, below gives a comparison of the number of signle words, two word sequences and three word sequences that were found to be common to both 5½ year old children's language and each of four currently used reading series.

TABLE 3

Percentage of Single Words and Word Sequences Common to Both 5½ Year Old Children's Language and that of Four Commonly Used Reading Series (comparing the 100 most frequent words and sequences in each sample).

Reading Series	Percentage of single words or sequences common with 5½ year old language		
	Single Words	Two Word Sequences	Three Word Sequences
Series A	54%	17%	2%
Series B	53%	12%	2%
Series C	48%	11%	2%
Series D	52%	17%	0%

Table 4 compares the words and sequences that were found to be common when the language of children aged 2½, 3½, 4½ and 6½ years of age was compared to that of 5½ year old children. When this table is compared with Table 3 it underlines the fundamental difference that exists between the language of children and that of the reading books.

TABLE 4

Percentage of Single Words and Word Sequences Common to Both 5½ Year Old Children's Language and that of Children of Other Ages (comparing the 100 most frequent words and sequences in each sample).

Age Levels of Samples	Percentage of single words or sequences common with 5½ year old language		
	Single Words	Two Word Sequences	Three Word Sequences
2½ yrs.	85%	39%	6%
3½ yrs.	81%	49%	17%
4½ yrs.	82%	59%	21%
6½ yrs.	92%	81%	62%

Incidentally, it appears that this fundamental factor which writers of children's readers have missed has not been missed by writers of adult reading material. Our early investigations into popular adult reading material reveal greater commonality between the language used in that adult reading material and children's oral language than there is between that of the basal readers we have analysed and the oral language of children for which they were designed.

What is the factor that has been missed? We think it is control of the sequences of language which are used over and over in the wide variety of situations which involve language. The sequences I refer to are so functionally useful that they constitute some 60% to 70% of every naturalistic oral language corpus if that corpus is sufficiently large and varied in situational context. We call these sequences "signalling sequences" because they signal syntactically and semantically what will follow. We refer to them as constituting the "core" of a language corpus because they play such a major role in facilitating prediction for meaning. They appear to be the essential component of what Smith, Goodman and Meredith (10) are demanding in their first two criteria for providing materials for children to read:

1. They (the materials) must contain real language as close as possible to the language the child already knows; and

2. They must emphasise the most common patterns and sequences of oral language. The most expected phenomena should occur with greater frequency.

It is now almost ten years since we set out to uncover the features which are characteristic of child language at various age levels. Our task called for a very different analysis of children's language from

those currently available. With financial support, initially from the Van Leer Foundation and in later years from the Australian Educational Research and Development Committee, my teams have collected carefully planned language samples ranging from 2½ years to 6½ years. The subjects at each age level were randomly chosen from all children of that age in the city of Brisbane (population approaching one million). All the language spoken by each subject during the normal on-going activity of an entire day was recorded, transcribed, coded and then ordered by a computer concordance program which brought together similar word and word sequence forms within their immediate verbal context. An index system gave easy access from each occurrence to the larger verbal context including the speech of other participants in the speech episode and also to notations of the situational context.

Figure (1) on page 12 illustrates a sample page from the computer print-out for the analysis of children's language.

It is on this data base that we have analysed the surface, semantic and functional features of the "signalling sequences" and other elements characteristic of the naturalistic utterances of children at each age level. Thus, our language/reading materials have been based on what we have learnt about child language and the strategies employed in the program have been shaped around such assumptions about child language learning as I outlined in the early part of this paper.

ALL THE MATCH-SP UP AND QUERY . I KNOW I HAVE TO WHEN	I-M DOING THE LESSON-SP . NOTHING . +NOTHIN . HEY THESE	51144	51
E BEATING ME . I-M ONLY UP TO THIRTY . I-M FINISHED .	I-M DOING YES AND NO . YES . I UM SOMETHING WERE . ? WHA	5292	25
YOU DO A FRINGE LIKE THIS . LOOK . YOU-RE DOING ME .	I-M DOING YOU . YOU-RE DOING PIGGY TAIL-SP ON ME . YES .	53249	26
IT KEEPS ON GOING . CAN-LL BLOW UP BECAUSE LOOK WHAT	I-M DOING . +CAUSE . /RES . THE THING-LL BLOW UP . LOOK	3016	11
	653 1		
	603 1		
	651 5		
	605 4		
	3 MORPHEMES 8 SPEAKERS		
HERE-S JOY . TEN TEN TEN . EXCUSE ME . TELL MY MOTHER	I-M DOWN IN THE SAND . ? IS IT . O OH THAT-S JOY . THAT-	3188	8
BECAUSE I BEEP QUERY . +NOTHIN-S +CAUSE /RES . I AM .	I-M DRIVER . /RES . LOOK OUT BEEP BEEP . I-VE GOT TO GO	5163	45
P . YOU HAVENT EVEN TOOK THEM OFF . +EM . /RES . NO .	I-M DRIVING . OKAY . TEMPLEMAN TO VICTORY . YOU CAN TAKE	1125	1
. XI-XLL . I-LL USE THAT . FILLS IT UP PRETTY QUICK .	I-M FILLING YOUR TRUCK UP . +FILLIN . +YA . FROM NOW ON	1346	44
IL . NO . YES . XYES X? . RIGHT . YES . +YEAH . YES .	I-M FINISHED . EXCUSE ME . OW . ? WHAT-SDO THIS MEAN . E	53086	52
NING . AH YOU-RE BEATING ME . I-M ONLY UP TO THIRTY .	I-M FINISHED . I-M DOING YES AND NO . YES . I UM SOMETHI	5292	10
	653 1		
	605 1		
	3 MORPHEMES 2 SPEAKERS		
A MONKEY . I-VE GOT THE LAST BIT OF EGG IN MY MOUTH .	I-M FULL . BIG SOOKY BABY . /RES . YES PLEASE . YES THAN	56109	53
-S NOT IT . YOU SAY HELLO . I-M NOT GOING TO HAVE ANY	I-M FULL . THIS AFTERNOON I WAS GETTING REAL HOT WITH TH	54542	1
/RES . I DONT WANT IT ALL . I DONT WANT THEM . +EM .	I-M FULL . WANT SANDY BACK MUMMY . /RES . THERE-S A LADD	56135	54
	654 1		
	656 2		
	3 MORPHEMES 2 SPEAKERS		
DARL . I TOLD YOUR MUMMY . XI . I TOLD MY MUMMY TOO .	I-M GETTING FAT . I HAVE TO BE UM ON A DIET OR SOMETHING	51102	58
. ? IS ANYBODY THERE . I-VE FINISHED . NOW I-M SICK .	I-M GETTING HOT . I-M HOT IN THIS . I WANT TO WATCH RATL	54566	40
ETTING FAT . I HAVE TO BE UM ON A DIET OR SOMETHING .	I-M GETTING REALLY FAT . NO NOT SO FAT . OH . OH CANT LO	51103	42
ANYONE CAN GO . SO . O LETS GO UNDER THE HOUSE PAUL .	I-M GETTING SICK OF BEING OUT HERE . +GETTIN . +BEIN . O	1141	58
	654 1		
	651 2		
	601 1		
	3 MORPHEMES 3 SPEAKERS		
O . OH IT-S NOT YOUR KICK . I-M GOALIE . +GOLDIE . NO	I-M GOALIE . +GOLDIE . ? YES I-M THE GOALIE ? ARENT I	5283	29
NO GOAL GIVE US IT . +GOLD . OH IT-S NOT YOUR KICK .	I-M GOALIE . +GOLDIE . NO I-M GOALIE . +GOLDIE . ? YES I	5283	3
L GET THIS ONE . STRAIGHT UP IN THE AIR . YES BUT NOT	I-M GOALIE . +YEAH +GOLDIE . GET IN THE GAME . I-M NOT .	5276	23
	605 3		
	3 MORPHEMES 1 SPEAKERS		
HY . WELL DONT SING THAT THEN . OKAY SING THAT THEN .	I-M GOING BACK DOWN NOW . ANDREW FIRST . YOU CAN HAVE ON	56296	1
BRING ME THING UP . /RES . I-LL BE BACK IN A MINUTE .	I-M GOING DOWNSTAIRS TO GET MY THING . YOU KNOW . COCONU	1500	28
ONE . BYE CINDY . PENNY WANTS YOU . PENNY WANTS YOU .	I-M GOING IN THEIR CAR . I USED TO DO THAT . I HAD TO WA	53265	62
. MR MAC . QUERY COURT-SP TENNIS COURT-SP AND QUERY .	I-M GOING TO BE FIRST ONE IN STUCK INTO THE TENNIS . +GO	13195	70
ONE-SP ON AND HE TOLD ME TO GO AWAY AND TALK . XIAN .	I-M GOING TO BE ON TELLY . THREE . HE IS THREE YEAR-SP O	54577	60
AH . I MEAN YES ALRIGHT HE WILL BE THREE SOON BECAUSE	I-M GOING TO BE SEVEN IN UM ON THIS WEDNESDAY . +YEAH +C	13035	48
	654 1		
	613 2		
	5 MORPHEMES 2 SPEAKERS		
LEAVE THE TABLE PLEASE MY BABY MOTHER . I LIKE YOU .	I-M GOING TO BRING MY ROCK DOWN . +GONNA . MY MOUSEY . /	56111	56
U TOPE THOSE MASK-SP THE CLOWN ONE DIDNT YOU . /RES .	I-M GOING TO BRING THEM DOWN . +GONNA . I-LL BRING MY FA	56119	20
	656 2		
	5 MORPHEMES 1 SPEAKERS		
TO BED . I-LL PUT MOUSEY IN ONE OF THE GIRL-SS HAIR .	I-M GOING TO BURP . +GONNA . HAD A FULL DINNER . /RES .	56115	65
TCH UP TO PENNY . ? WHAT . O HUH . ? WHAT . HEH KIM .	I-M GOING TO CATCH UP TO PENNY . PENNY . ? WHAT . HA HA	53171	1
. NO WHEN SHE COMES I-LL CLOB HER ON THE HEAD . OKAY	I-M GOING TO CLUB YOU ON THE HEAD WHEN YOU COME . WITH A	54245	66
RBOLT . THAT-S THE OTHER BOY IN THERE . YES . +YEAH .	I-M GOING TO COUNT TEN . +GONNA . I-M CAPTAIN THUNDERBOL	1085	23
R THE PEOPLE-SP . /RES . I NEVER FILLED HERE . /RES .	I-M GOING TO DIG OUT ALL UNDERNEATH . /RES . ? DAD CAN	3289	22
HE SAID THAT-S THE BEST ONE SHE-SHA HEARD . O DADDY .	I-M GOING TO DO A GOOD ONE . +GONNA . HERE-S A GOOD ONE	1513	52
. THEY-RE DONE . I-M GOING TO PACK THE SILLY ROD-SP .	I-M GOING TO DO ALL OUR TABLE . +GONNA . LOOK AT THIS .	51128	34
TH . YOU CAN USE YOUR . MY FELT-SP AND MY CRAYON-SP .	I-M GOING TO DO ONE LIKE THAT . BROWN . WAIT A MOMENT .	53234	38
DO SOMETHING ELSE IF YOU-LL BE VERY GOOD . TRACING .	I-M GOING TO DO SOME TRACING NOW . +GONNA . SOMETIMES WH	56125	26
+YEAH . THERE . AND I DIDNT QUERY . NOT DARK BROWN .	I-M GOING TO DO YOU UP ABOUT . +GONNA . THAT-S WHAT I-M	53245	32

FIGURE (1)

Sample page of computer print-out from the language of 6½ year old children

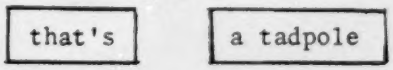
One major task in compiling the reading materials arose from the fact that the core "signalling sequences" appropriate to each age level had to be combined with "contentives" to ake complete sentences or meaningful portions of sentences. The "contentives" were taken from two sources.

1. The way children of that age characteristically added "contentives" to "signalling sequences".

2. Concepts which children would normally be developing at that age.

Thus, signalling sequences such as "I'm going to" "that's" "it's" "I've got" "I want" "I know" call for "content sequences" in order to complete the sentences. If the theme of the book is the life cycle of the frog, then suitable "content sequences" might be "a tadpole" "a frog's egg" "a frog" "four legs" my home" "the creek". The reading book is written as one set of sentences which children might use if they were studying the life cycle of a frog from a real life situation.

The success of the books themselves depends on the language lessons which lead up to their presentation. Each reading book needs to have language lessons which might take up to two weeks time prior to the presentation of the reading book. In these language lessons, which we call Pragmatic Language Lessons, the children talk about real life situations and use the required "signalling sequences" completing these from the meaning they take from the real life situation. Samples of sentences elicited from children in this way might be "That's a frog's egg" "It's going to be a tadpole" or "That's a tadpole" "It's got four legs". The children find there are many ways of combining the "signalling sequences" with "content sequences" to make meaningful sentences. The sentences become psychologically real to the children. The "signalling sequences" have been used so frequently by these children in their language that they have no problem applying them orally to the real life situation set up by the teacher. There is no trouble either in transferring meaning to the written form when it is presented using the same real life situations as was used for the oral form. This is usually done through cards with sequences presented on them e.g.



Children are asked first to use oral language, then use the suitable printed form, and finally to "read" from the printed form.

Children thus seek visual cues in order to link visual with oral. There need not be a rule-governed phonic analysis at this stage. The rules could not be expressed by the children in any case. However, through practice at recognising the written form in association with the oral, children will learn to use three different kinds of cues. These are the cue systems within words, the cue systems in the flow of language and the cue systems coming from the reader's own experiences. Later word attack skills are welcomed by the children once they have worked out how to decode written material and arek seeking extra help in identifying new words, particularly new content words.

In summary (1) Every "signalling sequence" used as a basis for the reading book must be elicited in the first place from the children as part of a sentence which has meaning for them.

(2) Hence a real life situation must be set up as preparation for each reading book.

(3) All the practice of both oral and read language takes place prior to the presentation of the reading book.

(4) The presentationof this book is of very short duration. Thus, it remains interesting and motivating, especially if the children have a reasonable chance of taking meaning from what they see.

(5) The sentences in this book are likely to be novel combinations of "signalling sequences" and "content sequences" and yet because of their practice at using various combinations, children are likely to cope with this successfully.

(6) The reading book not only becomes a test of the child's ability to read for meaning but also a source of motivation for further reading as his interest and success are assured in most cases.

(7) Each book retains its interest and usefulness as they should not be used long enough to be learned by heart.

(8) Word attack skills are taught once the children have learnt to decode for themselves. Thus, these skills become cues for prediction of meaning rather than mere recoding words into sounds.

For over thirty years the practice of using vocabulary controlled reading books has served us well. However, we can improve on this as a result of our language analysis. The Mt. Gravatt Developmental Language Reading Program offers language controlled reading books for the first time through our signalling sequences. These must be used in a special lesson called the Pragmatic Language Lesson. The materials offered in the Mt. Gravatt Developmental Language Reading Program further illustrate the type of innovative material available as a result of the Language Research Project. Figure(2) on Page 11 sets out the components of the scheme.

A similar plan operates for the twenty books of Level 2. Our research data up to 6½ years has allowed us to write books to this stage. This research is reported in "Your Children's Language - A Key to Literacy" (Hart Walker and Gray 1976). During the first half of 1976 we have been collecting language from 8½ year old children. This will be completed shortly after August and by September we should have the data to enable us to write Levels 3 and 4. We will be collecting both oral and written language from the 8½ year old children.

During 1977, our project extends to the language of 10½ year old children and this material will provide the basis for language to be used in our Levels 5 and 6.

Paralleling these practical outcomes has been the development of a language theory which we hope will aid teachers in their work with children through their school years, both primary and secondary.

The Language Research Project has been supported by the Australian Educational Research and Development Committee. It is hoped that royalties from the Language Program will enable the setting up of a National Research and Learning Centre which will enable us to carry on this action research.

FIGURE (2)

The Components of the Mount Gravatt
Developmental Language Reading Program

1. Thirty Reading Books with themes relating to:-

   (a) Me and Other People
   (b) Me and the Animate World
   (c) Me and the Physical World
   (d) Me and Working Things Out
   (e) Me and Make Believe
   (f) Me and Expressing Myself

2. Signalling sequences selected from core language of children as a basis for language content. These are set out in the Teachers Manual for each language lesson.

3. Master stencils for duplicating language sequences for children's usage in oral and read language.

4. Thirty outlines of Pragmatic Language Lesson material - one for each reading book.

5. Over thirty Musical Games for language reinforcement. At least one per title.

6. Thirty lists of "listening stories" on the same theme as each of the reading books for the teacher to read to the children.

7. A complete phonetic analysis of every word used in the thirty books and relevant lists in the appendix so that teachers have ready access to relevant phonic material which is meaningful to the children as they have used the words in their language lesson and reading.

8. The choice of approach to word attack skills development and instructions for implementing a word attack skills development program through puppetry.

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